

Transcript - Tour of Conger Complex

Eric:

We're out here on the Confusion HMA, or Confusion Mountain HMA. We have an AML, or appropriate management level, of 115 for the high end and 70 for the low, and our current population here right now is 320 horses. We have not gathered this particular heard area since 2003, so we're about eight years out of actually from actually being here gathering. We've done a few things as far as our management to keep horses here without having to come back in, which has helped us, but this is a very tough piece of real estate for horses to make a living on. If you look around, and you see behind me, there's very few trees. There's very few perennial type plants that put out a whole lot of forage -- and we'll point some of those out, as to what the horses actually utilize to make a, to sustain themselves out here on the HMA.

One of the key plant species that we monitor the range lands that the horses really use is what we call a white sage or a winter fat plant. This plant here has got a lot of protein and allows the horses to survive during the winter months and into, from the fall into the spring. On good years we can find this plant up here another four or five inches and it really helps them pull through. This is one of those key plants species that we watch. The horses get a lot of use out of it and a lot of nutrition. A couple of the other plant species that we see most commonly out here out in the desert is this one here which is an Indian Rice Grass. It hasn't started to come on yet. It's still just a little bit cool for it to really start greening up. We are seeing a few of these little fescue plants starting. At this time of the year, the horses really spend a lot of time chasing that little bit of green that's just starting to come on. The one thing that we find here on the Confusions is the lack of available forage. And you figure that we have an acreage that's approximately 250,000 acres, which may seem like a lot, and in space it is a big piece of ground. As you can see right here around me how much the interspace between the plants is, does not contain any type of vegetation. It's real small. It's real sparse. It's limited to the amount of available forage for horses to actually live.

We're out here on the Conger Mountain HMA. We have an appropriate management level for these horses at a range from 40 to 80 and our current population is around 240. We can look around and see the green-up that these horses have, are chasing in so few areas that will also as they -- as they go after the water -- or after the grass and their body conditions will drop because these initial shoots, as we see right here on this plant next to this sagebrush has been nipped down already. The horses have already started to use it. You can see this was last year's growth. So we know we're in their winter range. And then as we look around we can also see other spots where they haven't hit. So what they're doing right now is just trying to chase that initial greenup and their body conditions will start to show some of the drop. You can see here we've got the new coming in that they haven't utilized. And as we go into this -- until the spring to where this grass finally gets substantial enough that they can start putting on weight, their

bodies will drop just a little bit. We're also going into that foaling season where the mares will look poor trying to maintain not only their body conditions but also that of their unborn colt and eventually their colt once it hits the ground.

What we're looking at here is a needle and thread grass, or Stipa comata, this is the winter feed for the horses here on the winter ranges. What you see that this here was left from last year. They haven't touched it at all this year. You can see the green that's coming up in here. You can see the amount of growth that we have that's coming up inside as opposed to the one next to it that's been utilized already.

The general public may wonder why we gather horses off of our public ranges. The reason we gather horses off of our HMAs that we have is because their population increases and as population increases that puts a strain on the resource that they need to have in order to sustain themselves out here on the rangelands. Management within the herd areas that we have in the west is very important and if we can maintain or find ways to suppress the population growth to where it doesn't increase at that 20% that we see on an average, then those horses are able to maintain themselves out here on the deserts longer without the interference of us, and we're able to manage them at appropriate management levels over a longer period of time.

Kathy:

Utah is the second driest state in the United States. We receive approximately six inches of rain per year, and I think it's extremely important that those wild horses are managed, which allows us to manage our resources. With the lack of moisture that we have, it takes an extremely long time for vegetation to generate or regenerate.

Jason:

There are some habitat manipulations that we can do to increase the forage. We are managing for multiple use, and so there's horses, there's elk, there's pronghorn. We have population objectives set on all of our populations so we have a public hunt to remove those animals. In some situations we are limited by our water resource, our precipitation, and there's not a lot of manipulation we can do to increase the forages.

Ben:

When all the numbers are in alignment, the range seems to, you know, go along pretty well, and, you know, there's enough feed for everything, enough water for everything. But when one of them gets high, higher than it should be, then the others is the ones that seems to adjust.

Daron:

You know, I'd say most of the folks in our county enjoy seeing them. I know there's quite a few folks who come in from outside the area to watch the horses, which is a tourism thing for us. They like to see them, but they wouldn't want to see them just kind of overtake things and just let roam, and for their safety and other people's safety, they like the idea that they are being responsibly managed and that there's a plan and that they can come and have input in that process.

Gale:

We, as the National Mustang Association, know that the land has to be protected so that they have enough forage and that the numbers can't over-ride what there is here for them, or it's a disaster to them. So, we're interested in a healthy heard that can stay here and be managed. They're a beautiful animal.

Kathy:

I think people need to do more research. That instead of taking what you read or what you hear, you need to do the research necessary and question and talk to BLM staff, talk to the people that are on the range, and find out what really happens. Because a lot of times you're just shown the -- what's sensational. If you remove that, you can learn the facts for yourself and make up your own mind.